



A Shared Gift

Adoption Choices of Nevada
connects birth parents and
adoptive parents,
making families possible

Staff of the Adoption Choices offices in Las Vegas (top) and Reno (bottom) work together to make families possible.
TOP PHOTO: JAB BUHAY
BOTTOM PHOTO: ERIC MARKS

Creating Families

Adoption Choices of Nevada serves the needs of birth parents and adoptive parents

■ BY ANNE STOKES



“Our goal is always to find families for babies and provide the **best possible services** to both birth parents and adoptive parents.”

Jo McLaughlin
Director of Social Services,
Adoption Choices of Nevada



Since 2008, Adoption Choices of Nevada has been instrumental in creating hundreds of families. The 501(c)(3) nonprofit agency enables birth families to make the best possible plan for their children’s future while at the same time helping adoptive families welcome children into their lives.

“Our goal is always to find families for babies and provide the best possible services to both birth parents and adoptive parents,” says Jo McLaughlin, Adoption Choices Director of Social Services. “What that means for birth parents is making sure that they’re really educated about what their options are and how to access those options. For adoptive parents, it’s very much the same. There’s a lot of support given to both birth and adoptive parents.”

Originally an offshoot of Adoption Choices of Colorado, the agency has offices in Las Vegas and Reno, as well as offering services in the Elko area. Twelve licensed social workers in both offices facilitate up to 40 placements each year. Between McLaughlin, who heads the Las Vegas office, and Executive Director Maire Burgess in Reno, Adoption Choice’s leadership has over 60 years of adoption experience with both private and government agencies.

McLaughlin, who started working with adoptive families in 1992, says that she felt a calling to work with expectant mothers. That dedication makes her well-suited for her work at Adoption Choices; she helps pregnant women accomplish their goals while helping others create

families they might not otherwise be able to have.

“I enjoy working with the women who are pregnant and helping them not feel overwhelmed, to feel like they can put a plan in place, whatever that plan is,” she says.

For Burgess, one of the most important things for birth and adoptive families to understand is that Adoption Choices is there to help them through whatever adoption hurdles they may be facing – without judgment.

“We’re here to support whichever decision they think is going to be best for their child,” Burgess says. “[I want] to let them know how passionate, how caring, and non-judgmental my staff is. They are amazing and they’re there to help you all the way through the process.”

ADOPTION CHOICES: BY THE NUMBERS

Since its beginning in 2008, Adoption Choices of Nevada has facilitated a total of

216
ADOPTIONS

Average number of placements successfully completed each year:

30-40



Adoption Choices of Nevada has

130
YEARS

of combined **social work experience** between staff members in the Reno and Las Vegas offices.



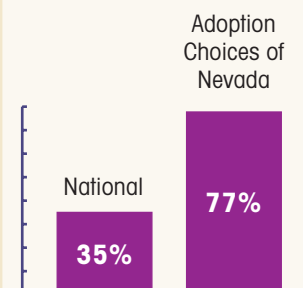
Most adoptive families have successful placement within
6 MONTHS
to
1 YEAR

Nationally, **38% of birth parents cancel adoptions.** With Adoption Choices of Nevada this happens in less than

3%
OF CASES



Average number of adoptions that involve both birth parents:



Making a Plan for Adoption

A birth mother's story

■ BY ANNE STOKES

When Jessica Rodriguez found herself pregnant in August 2013, her options were limited. "I just wasn't going to be able to do it; financially, I wasn't stable enough," says the single mother of four sons who works as a server at a local casino. "Adoption was my only choice besides abortion."

Jessica was initially drawn to Adoption Choices of Nevada because of online testimonials from adoptive families. True to its name, Jessica says Adoption Choices staff empowered her to make the best decisions possible for her baby's future. Even the way they talked about adoption was supportive of Jessica's choices – she was "making a plan" for her son, not "giving him up."

"They let me know that I was in charge and I had the final say in everything," she says. "I was trying to give him a better life than I could provide for him at the time. They made me feel that I was doing something very positive and helping a couple that couldn't have a baby on their own."

When it came time to find an adoptive family for her son, Jessica was able to choose between multiple families, finally settling on a couple from out of state. She made sure to involve her older sons in the adoption process

as well, and both families were able to meet before the baby was born. It was important to her that her sons had a chance to help plan for their brother's future. The baby's middle name, Gaje, is an anagram of his brothers' initials.

The families have an open adoption arrangement. Although their agreement calls for sharing at least one photo twice a year, Jessica receives updates much more often.

"They are picture-happy, and I get tons and tons of pictures of him every six months, and I get to see him grow," she says. "It makes me a little sad to see him and how much he's grown and that I couldn't be there ... but when I see those pictures, it reminds me why I did it, and it reminds me that I did do a good thing."

"They made me feel that I was doing something very positive and helping a couple that couldn't have a baby on their own."

Jessica Rodriguez
Birth mother

Jessica Rodriguez was already a single mother of four when she made the choice to work with Adoption Choices of Nevada to provide for her unborn son's future. Jessica allowed her sons (below) to participate in the process, even letting them choose their baby brother's name.

PHOTOS BY ERIC MARKS



KNOWING YOUR RIGHTS AS BIRTH FAMILIES

It is essential that birth families understand their rights as they consider placing a child into an adoptive home. As experts in the field, Adoption Choices values and protects the rights of birth families every step of the way.



Make a plan

Social workers help birth families make the best choice by offering information on all options, including parenting the child and abortion.



Choose a family

Birth families do not hand their baby over to strangers. They have the power to choose families based on ethnicity, religion and many other factors. Adoption Choices works to find a family that aligns with birth parents' preferences.



Level of communication

Birth families can have as much or as little communication with the child and adoptive families as they'd prefer. Through the website ChildConnect, birth families can access updates, photos and more on the child through his or her 18th birthday.



Confidentiality

Adoption Choices works to protect the level of confidentiality each birth parent prefers.

More resources for birth families are available at www.adoptionchoicesofnevada.org/expectant-mothers/resource-websites/



Elizabeth Peterson was 16 and scared when she became pregnant. She was put at ease by the staff at Adoption Choices, who gave her information, covered medical bills and provided counseling throughout her adoption journey. PHOTO BY JAB BUHAY

Supported in Her Choice

Birth mother found information and resources at Adoption Choices

■ BY ANNA QUINLAN

“Seeing their reaction to meeting the baby made me so happy. I just knew that these people that I don’t even know are going to love this baby as their own.”

Elizabeth Peterson
Birth mother

When Elizabeth Peterson found out she was pregnant as a 16-year-old high school sophomore, she panicked. “I was scared more than anything,” she says. “I didn’t know what to do.

“I thought about abortion, but for me, it just wasn’t something I could do,” Elizabeth says. “My mom talked with me about my future goals and how a baby would fit into that life.”

When the Las Vegas teen reached out to Adoption Choices, she was immediately put at ease by Jo McLaughlin, Director of Social Services. “Jo was very down-to-

earth, very open about what would happen and how it would happen,” Elizabeth recalls. “She lightened the mood and did her best to make us feel comfortable, never pressured.”

The agency made sure that she received every resource necessary for a healthy pregnancy. They reimbursed her existing medical bills and handled all future medical expenses, allowing Elizabeth to continue seeing the doctor she had chosen. She also received additional funds to help with groceries and maternity clothes, and an open offer to receive counseling services.

Based on an intensive survey about Elizabeth’s preferences regarding adoptive families, Adoption Choices gave Peterson the profiles of five couples to review. She narrowed it down to a couple who worked in photography and painting. “I wanted a more artistic family because I’ve always loved art and I wanted my child to grow up around that,” she says.

Elizabeth felt embarrassed by the “16 And Pregnant” stereotype and worried that the adoptive family would look down on her during their initial meeting.

Instead, they asked if they could greet her with a hug. “They were just overjoyed,” Elizabeth says. “They just kept saying that they couldn’t thank me enough.”

When the baby was born, the adoptive family arrived from Colorado within 12 hours of being notified that Elizabeth was in labor. “Even though my mind was made up, seeing their reaction to meeting the baby made me so happy. I just knew that these people that I don’t even know are going to love this baby as their own.”

It was difficult to transition back to normal life after giving birth, Elizabeth says. “Adoption Choices reached out to me constantly to make sure that I was doing OK.” She attended group therapy at the agency a few times and eventually felt better.

“I’m definitely happy now,” she says. “I love him and I did this for him, and I know it was the right thing to do.”

Now 18, Elizabeth is currently a student at University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where she is studying to become an art teacher.

SUPPORT FOR BIRTH FAMILIES

When birth families decide to place their child into an adoptive home, Adoption Choices makes the process clear and as easy as possible. Here’s how:

Pre-birth adoption counseling

Social workers meet one-on-one with birth parents to help them make decisions and understand what to expect.

Accessing services

When necessary, Adoption Choices helps birth parents obtain Social Security cards, driver’s licenses and other forms of identification and paperwork so they can access services.

Medical care

The health and safety of mother and child is of utmost importance. Uninsured mothers are referred to doctors quickly so they can begin prenatal care.

Financial assistance

The medical costs, legal fees and eligible living and travel expenses are covered through fees paid by adoptive families before and after the child is born.

Post-birth support

Birth families receive counseling to manage grief, transition back into the workplace and more. Adoption Choices also hosts peer support groups, where birth families can discuss their adoption experience — even if it was arranged through a different agency.

Answers to the common questions posed by birth families can be found at www.adoptionchoicesofnevada.org/expectant-mothers/faqs/

Formed by Love

After infertility struggle, adoption was a blessing

■ BY ANNA QUINLAN

The road that Wendy traveled to adopt her now 1-year-old daughter can be traced as far back as her own childhood.

"I had always thought about adoption, even when I was younger," she says. "I remember seeing UNICEF stories on television and wanting to sweep all those children up and give them a home."

When she married her husband, Jason, at the age of 32, she became a stepmother to his 8-year-old daughter and 6-year-old son, of whom they had primary custody. About a year and a half after marrying, the North Carolina couple began casually trying to get pregnant in hopes of expanding their family.

After struggling to get pregnant, the couple eventually underwent four rounds of in vitro fertilization (IVF), which heartbreakingly yielded four miscarriages. A final unsuccessful attempt to conceive with the help of a gestational carrier was the last step in the couple's painful struggle with infertility.

While Wendy had always been open to the idea of adoption, Jason "was honest with himself" about the challenges it might pose.

"He wanted to make sure he could love a child that wasn't his blood," Wendy says.

He sought out a counselor specializing in adoption to discuss his fears and ultimately decided that he was ready to take the next step.

"It was important to us to work with an agency that cared about the birth family, not just the adoption," says Wendy, who chose to work with Adoption Choices for that reason. "We felt like they really cared about the experience that birth parents go through, and that they support them no matter what they ultimately decide to do."

In January 2015, just a few months after Adoption Choices activated their file, Wendy and Jason were thrilled to get the news that a couple in Las Vegas had chosen them to be the adoptive parents to a baby girl they had just delivered. The couple traveled to Nevada to meet their daughter and her birth parents when she was six days old. All four parents spent about six hours together getting to know one another. They agreed to an open adoption, meaning that the families stay in touch online. Wendy and Jason regularly send photos and have the option for annual visits.

"I know that it was difficult for the birth parents to place Breena for adoption," Wendy says. "They did it because they love her, and it's been a wonderful blessing."

Wendy welcomed baby Breena into her family following a long and painful struggle with infertility.
PHOTO BY SARA CAUDLE



"It was important to us to work with an agency that **cared about the birth family**, not just the adoption."

Wendy
Adoptive parent

SUPPORT FOR ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

When a family decides to adopt a child, the process should never be filled with unknowns. Adoption Choices wants adoptive families to understand the entire process. Here's how:

Education

Prospective adoptive families will go through an individualized home study program, which covers topics like coping with infertility, a child's developmental stages, issues around race and ethnicity, and the overall adoption process.

Choice and familiarity

Adoptive families can choose the level of communication they prefer to have with birth families. They also receive information on a child's medical history and family background. This and other information helps Adoption Choices make a good match for the family.

Short wait times

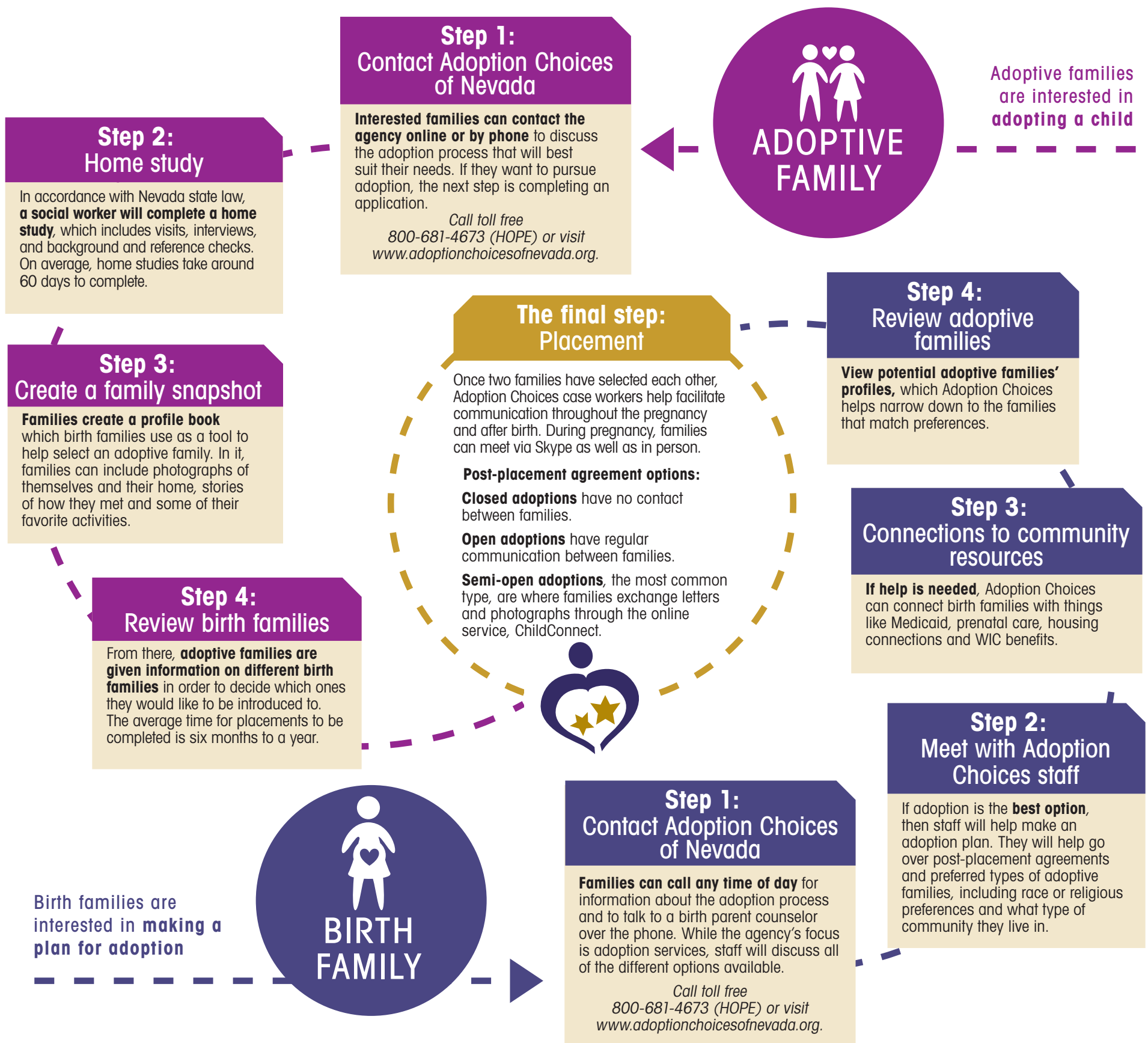
The average wait time for a child is approximately six months to one year at Adoption Choices.

Same-sex parents

Nevada law allows same-sex couples to adopt easily. Both parents are listed on the birth certificate and Adoption Choices helps facilitate successful adoptions for all families.

Visit www.adoptionchoicesofnevada.org/adoptive-parents/ for application information, a list of resources and more.

The Adoption Journey



A Passion for Making Families Possible

Q&A with Adoption Choices Executive Director Maire Burgess

■ BY ANNE STOKES

Maire Burgess, Executive Director of Adoption Choices of Nevada, has 21 years of experience bringing families together. Before Adoption Choices of Nevada opened in 2008, Burgess was instrumental in redesigning the State of Nevada's social services adoption process, creating a specialized unit where social workers' main focus was finding adoptive families. Today, Burgess enables both birth and adoptive families to create the best lives possible for children.

What makes you passionate about your work?

There is something so special about working with brave women and men who realize that now is not the time to have care of an infant. We're creating families [and] we are keeping children out of the foster care system.

Even after all of these years, I get a tear in my eye when I watch birth parents and adoptive parents talking and sharing love for an infant. There's something so extraordinarily spiritual about that. It's a pretty amazing thing.

What makes Adoption Choices stand out from other service providers?

Every one of my staff has an understanding of the challenges and try to soften them for both parties. What we do not only creates families, but it gives dignity to all parties. That's a really fine balance to try and find.

Is it common for agencies to center the adoption process on the birth families' needs and wants?

We look for families based on what the birth couple tells us they want: Do you want them with or without children? Do you want them to be biracial or bilingual? Do you want them to live in a city or a rural town? Are you interested in a same-sex couple? We ask them what they're looking for and that's what we go looking for. That is very different from many agencies, not just here in Nevada.

What makes Nevada a good choice for birth families and for adoptive families?

[Due to Nevada Revised Statute 127,] birth mothers cannot sign their relinquishment documents earlier than 72 hours after the birth of the baby. Once those documents are signed, they are irrevocable, which is wonderful for the adoptive couple because there is no waiver time.

Do all adoptions require an agency in Nevada?

Nevada is considered an "agency" state and all agencies which perform adoption services must be licensed by the State of Nevada. You do not need an agency in a step-parent adoption or a relative adoption as long as the adopting couple is within the third degree of blood to the baby. All others require a licensed adoption agency. If you reside in Nevada, it's best to use a Nevada agency because you're going to have to anyways at some point. This way you have one agency and one social worker with whom you are working; they will get to know you and your needs, whether you're a birth or adoptive family.

What kind of options do LGBTQ families have and do you work a lot with such families?

Same-sex couples are treated the same as any other couple seeking to adopt. They can finalize [over the phone] in Nevada if their state does not allow them both to finalize as a couple. It really is very LGBT-friendly.

What kind of fears do you encounter with birth families?

They're often fearful of being judged by people who know them for "giving away" their baby. They're very fearful of the grief that they're going to feel. Many of them are so fearful of that enormous amount of emotion. We try to help them give themselves credit for the incredible decision that they're making, their bravery, their courage and their sensitivity to the needs of their child.



Executive Director
Maire Burgess has been
with Adoption Choices
of Nevada since its
inception in 2008.
PHOTO BY ERIC MARKS

"We try to help them give themselves credit for the incredible decision that they're making, their bravery, their courage and their sensitivity to the needs of their child."

Maire Burgess
Executive Director,
Adoption Choices of Nevada

Creating Families: Adoption Choices

Whether you're looking to expand your family through adoption or you want to plan a better future for your child, Adoption Choices of Nevada can help. Everyone's situation is unique and staff members at both the Las Vegas and Reno locations can walk you through options to help decide if adoption is the right choice for you. Contact the Las Vegas or Reno office today for more information from a knowledgeable, compassionate social worker.



Adoption Choices of Nevada Las Vegas

222 S. Rainbow Blvd. Ste. 115
Las Vegas, NV 89145
702-474-4673 (HOPE)

Lic.# 125402470-02

Adoption Choices of Nevada Reno

789 E. 2nd St.
Reno, NV 89502
775-825-4673 (HOPE)

Lic.# 125402470

For more information, please visit the
Adoption Choices website at
www.adoptionchoicesofnevada.org



HELP SUPPORT FAMILIES WITH THE TOMORROW'S HOPE FUND

You can help Adoption Choices of Nevada provide services to birth and adoptive families with a tax-deductible donation to the Tomorrow's Hope Fund. Your gift can connect birth families to services such as job training, emergency housing assistance and access to medical care. The fund also helps adoptive families who may need additional financial resources to adopt a child with special needs. And for those children waiting in foster care for their forever family, the Tomorrow's Hope Fund can provide baby supplies such as car seats, diapers and formula.

To donate:

Make a check payable to Adoption Choices of Nevada and indicate "Tomorrow's Hope Fund" in the memo section. Once your donation is received, you will be sent a receipt for tax purposes. Donations can be mailed to the Las Vegas or Reno locations (see left for addresses).

Produced for Adoption Choices
of Nevada by N&R Publications,
www.nrpubs.com

